

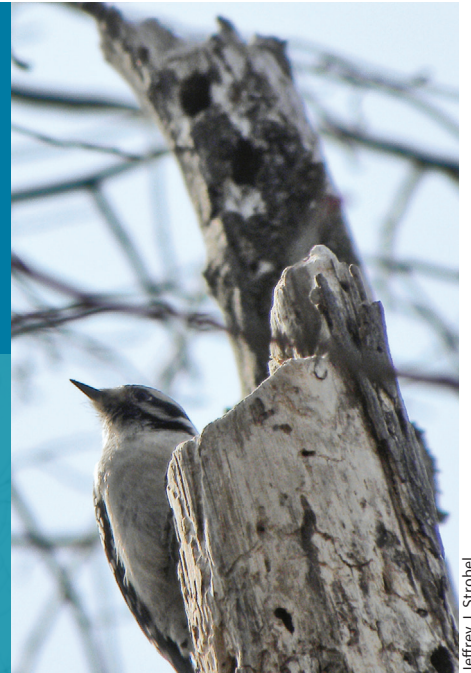


Snags

Snags are dead or dying trees that are still standing. They can be one of the most beneficial wildlife features in your yard because of the food and shelter they provide.

Provides: Food, shelter

Supports: Depending on the area, as many as 100 species of wildlife (birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians) have been documented to use snags!



Jeffrey J. Strobel

It's important to be aware of public ordinances when considering integrating snags into your property's habitat. Snags will eventually fall over and can pose a danger to human safety or property, therefore they require attention and maintenance. Consider consulting an arborist to assess the snags on your property to identify if any of them are "hazard trees" that pose a risk to human activity and safety. Unsafe limbs or hazardous portions of the trunk of a snag may need to be removed. Dying trees that lean away or are located downhill from human structures and activity pose very little threat.

Implementation Steps:

1 Identify a Snag in the Making – In surveying your property for potential new snags, look for the following:

- Signs of fungi on the bark.
- Tree has splits in its trunk or dead limbs.
- Animals, like woodpeckers, have already started using it.

2 Make your Own Snag – If your property lacks snags, there are a few ways to create them:

Step 1: Survey your property, taking note of hazard trees or trees that may form a snag.

Step 2: Create the snag! You can convert a living tree into a snag by one of the following ways:

- Removing the top third of the tree and half the remaining branches.
- Removing the majority of the tree's side branches (leaving top untouched).
- Girdling the trunk (removing a strip of bark around the circumference of the



David Drake

(Implementation Steps continued)

tree) and leaving the branches untouched. If you girdle a tree, you can speed the death of the tree by spraying an appropriate herbicide into the girdled area.

- Girdling the branches

If you want to create a snag near buildings, vehicles, or other items of value but are concerned the tree may fall, you can measure the distance from the base of the tree to the item of value and then cut the tree to a length that allows the tree to safely fall without harming people or pets or damaging property. ALWAYS hire an expert tree service to remove branches and tops of large trees.

Alternatively, you can create a cavity in a living tree. Create cavities by:

- Drilling a 1 in. diameter hole at a 10-degree angle downward into the heartwood of the tree so water can collect in the drilled cavity.



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- Following the creation of the cavity, remove a limb (4 in. or larger) to allow bacteria, fungi, and insects to get inside the tree and help to speed the rot.

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Maintenance – Regularly survey the snags on your property and assess the risk they pose to human wellbeing and property. Remove risks as necessary.

Other Resources:

- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources publication titled *Critter Condos: Managing dead wood for wildlife*
dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/wm/WM0222.pdf
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
wdfw.wa.gov/living/snags
– WDFW *Snags - the Wildlife Tree* pdf
- My Land Plan – a good resource for people who own largely forested property. Includes other management suggestions beyond fostering snags in a wooded habitat.
mylandplan.org/content/why-snags-and-cavities-living-trees-are-important



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